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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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DODO LACKED DEFENCE

The bird life of many oceanic islands is seriously endangered today. One wonders whether some kinds can survive the direct and indirect competition with man and his works. Will they join the ranks of the Dodo?

Perhaps some persons will assume that the term 'Dodo' designates a mythical creature. This is not so. The Dodo once lived on the Island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. It was, in a sense, a ponderous pigeon, approximating a swan in bulk. It had a large, hooked beak; heavy, short legs; and wings too small for flight. One may see these features for oneself by examining the splendid skeleton specimen preserved in the Royal Ontario Museum. Additional facts about the Dodo are preserved by historic record. During the seventeenth century several live Dodos were brought to Europe where drawings and paintings were made of them by various artists. From these we can see that the Dodo was covered with down-like feathers, that it was curiously rounded at the stern, and that its tail was a mere tuft of feathers carried jauntily.

About the middle of the seventeenth century colonizers introduced dogs and swine to the island of Mauritius and by 1681 the Dodo was no more. Its rapid extermination may not have been due so much to the ferocity of the newcomers as to the defencelessness of the bird. In addition to its inability to fight or flee, it laid its lone egg in the grass on open ground where it was easily destroyed.

Bones of the Dodo were found in considerable abundance during the nineteenth century in a swamp on Mauritius. Nearly complete skeletons, such as the one in the Museum, are rare.

ONTARIO AND QUEBEC MUSEUMS COOPERATE

Sculptured mounts of two woodland caribou are nearing completion in the Royal Ontario Museum. One is for the Museum of the Province of Quebec in Quebec City and the other will be retained by the Ontario Museum. The project is an example of mutual aid between these two institutions. Quebec furnished the caribou and completed the necessary work on the specimens in the field. Knud Nielsen, sculptor-taxidermist of the Royal Ontario Museum, has prepared the life-like forms and will soon finish the process of mounting the animals.

Woodland caribou have disappeared from much of their original range. The specimens came from Mount Albert, Gaspe, Quebec, where the species still thrives.

HOW TO WIN PLEASURE AND INFLUENCE YOURSELF

Nature around about us can yield pleasure and enthralling interest. It is ours to reap. Profits can accrue and capital remain unimpaired. There are rocks and fossils, minerals and animals, which can be collected. Do you prefer butterflies or trilobites? What do you know of the Indians or geology of your district? The exhibits and publications of the Royal Ontario Museum will help you.

SHOES AND SHIPS AND SEALING WAX

The vast collections of the Royal Ontario Museum are so varied that there is something of interest for everyone. We can even make an almost perfect score with the list—shoes and ships and sealing-wax, and cabbages and kings. There are shoes of all sizes and shapes, and from many periods and countries, in the costume collection, and there are model ships for those that have a nautical turn of mind. Sealing-wax is less obvious, but there is plenty of it on our old letters and documents. We do have to cheat a bit when it comes to cabbages, for the best we can do are the cabbage roses that are such a feature of the design on many of the 19th century chintzes. We could finish off the list triumphantly with lots of kings, but our choice is a pair made of the most exquisite, carved ivory and belonging to a set of Chinese chessmen recently put on exhibition in one of the furniture galleries.

A MUSEUM NEEDS "KNOW HOW", TOO

The urgencies of war put a premium on the man who has "know-how", the special skill and knowledge to do a job quickly and well. Wars may be won or lost at the machinist's bench or in the research laboratory as well as at the fighting front. Craft of hand and agility of mind turn the trick. A Museum needs "know-how", too. Consider for a minute the Royal Ontario Museum and some of its jobs. To prepare for exhibition a moose's skin or a dinosaur's fossilized bones, the scientist, mechanic and artist must combine. To excavate an ancient Indian village site, to identify microfossils from an oil well boring, or to classify a rock or mineral, are all part of the day's work. See the evidence for yourself the next time you visit the museum.

HUNTING BIRDS INDOORS

The month of May is the peak period for bird-watching. Observing birds has now become a popular, entertaining, instructive and inexpensive past-time. Hundreds of people take to the fields and woods to meet personally and call by name the many Canadian birds which are returning to their nesting grounds.

It is possible to go on a bird "hunt" in the Royal Ontario Museum at any time of year, and by this we do not mean in the halls of ornithology. Make an expedition through the Egyptian galleries for example. Here the sharp eyes of the bird student can find the forms of birds sculptured or painted by artists of five thousand to two thousand years ago. Birds enter into the motif of decorations on walls and pottery. They are also included in the elaborate ornamental characters of pictographic writing. Among these birds of ancient Egypt are ostriches, ibises, falcons, buzzards, vultures, storks, flamingoes, pintail ducks, white-fronted geese, eagles, owls, crested larks, collared pratincoles and quail chicks. Bird-watching can be an indoor sport as well.